

"None of us is as smart as all of us." ~ Japanese Proverb

In 2016, 5.7 million U.S. residents over 12 years of age experienced violent victimizations. U.S. households experienced 15.9 million property crimes. Additionally, every day 28 people in the U.S. die in motor vehicle crashes that involve an impaired driver. These are staggering and sadly familiar statistics. We must remember that behind these numbers and many crimes, often stands a wounded and, sometimes shattered, victim needing help. As a community, we must work together to provide that necessary support.

April 8-14 is National Crime Victims' Rights Week, an annual observance to bring communities together and educate the public about victim's rights, protections, and services. It is also about forging new partnerships to improve service to crime victims. This year's theme is: ***Expand the Circle: Reach All Victims.***

Since I first started as a prosecutor over 15 years ago, victim-centered support in our local criminal justice system has grown immensely. In that time, our system has evolved from providing tremendously limited victim services to having well-established and professional victim advocacy units in every major local law enforcement agency. These units provide critical support and services to aid in physical and emotional recovery, protection from future victimizations, guidance through the criminal justice system, and assistance in obtaining restitution.

We have also taken steps to better serve our youngest victims. At the Washoe County Child Advocacy Center we have created a multi-disciplinary approach to child physical and sexual abuse cases where advocates, prosecutors, medical professionals, therapists, and law enforcement work together to maximize success in the prosecutions of child physical and sexual abusers, while also wrapping our arms around those victims to improve their futures.

Despite these positive forward steps, there is more we can do. I encourage all members of our community to step forward to expand the circle of support for victim advocacy and to help us reach all crime victims. During this important awareness week, ask yourself what can I do to help?

Whether it be volunteerism, philanthropy, or attending and supporting awareness events, there are plenty of opportunities to get involved and most certainly a need. Together we can ensure that our victims receive all the best resources this community has to offer.

Christopher J. Hicks is the 37th District Attorney for Washoe County. The Alliance for Victims' Rights Candlelight Vigil will be held at the Mills B. Lane Justice Center 3rd floor classroom on April 11, at 5:30.